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## Recession has struck some of the world's top economies

By **STAN CHOE** and **CHRIS-  
TOPHER RUGABER**  
AP Business Writers

**NEW YORK (AP)** — As some of the world's biggest economies stumble into recession, the United States keeps chugging along. Both Japan and the United Kingdom said Thursday their economies likely weakened during the final three months of 2023. For each, it would be the second straight quarter that's happened, which fits one lay definition for a recession.

Yet in the United States, the economy motored ahead in last year's fourth quarter for a sixth straight quarter of growth. It's blown past many predictions coming into last year that a recession seemed inevitable because of high interest rates

meant to slow the economy and inflation.

Give much of the credit to U.S. households, who have continued to spend at a solid rate despite many challenges. Their spending makes up the majority of the U.S. economy. Government stimulus helped households weather the initial stages of the pandemic and a jump in inflation, and now pay raises are helping them catch up to high prices for the goods and services they need.

On Thursday, a report showed that fewer U.S. workers filed for unemployment benefits last week. It's the latest signal of a remarkably solid job market, even though a litany of layoff announcements has grabbed attention recently. Continued strength



Shoppers and sightseers walk on Fifth Avenue on Dec. 11, 2023, in New York.

Associated Press

there should help prop up the economy.

Of course, risks still loom, and economists say a recession can't be ruled out. Inflation could reaccelerate. Worries about heavy borrowing by the U.S. government could upset fi-

ancial markets, ultimately making loans to buy cars and other things more expensive. Growing losses tied to commercial real estate could mean big pain for the financial system.

But, for now, the outlook continues to appear better

for the United States than many other big economies. The mood on Wall Street is so positive that the main measure of the U.S. stock market, the S&P 500 index, topped the 5,000 level last week for the first time.

Continued on next page

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**Continued from Front**

"First and foremost, it's important to emphasize that the market's performance is more a reflection of a thriving economy rather than unwarranted 'animal spirits' from investors," according to Solita Marcelli, chief investment officer, Americas, at UBS Global Wealth Management. When it upgraded its forecast for global growth in 2024 a couple weeks ago, the International Monetary Fund cited greater-than-expected resilience in the U.S. economy as a major reason.

Several unique characteristics of the U.S. economy have sheltered it from recessionary storms, analysts say. The U.S. government provided about \$5 trillion in pandemic aid in 2020-2021, far more than overseas counterparts, which left most households in much better financial shape and supported consumer spending well into 2023. The Biden administration has also subsidized more construction of manufacturing plants and infrastructure through additional legislation passed in 2021 and 2022 that was still having an impact last year. About one quarter of the



Shoppers walk along Oxford Street during the Boxing Day sales in London on Dec. 26, 2023. **Associated Press**

U.S. economy's solid 2.5% growth in 2023 was made up of government spending. Republican critics, however, charge that the extended spending contributed to higher inflation. "We had some policies that I do think helped us a lot," said Diane Swonk, chief economist at KPMG. "But also the structure of our economy is so much different." Americans have been better protected from rising rates than U.K. coun-

terparts, for example, because most U.S. homeowners with mortgages have long, 30-year fixed rates. As a result, the Federal Reserve's rapid rate hikes of the past two years -- which have lifted mortgage rates from around 3% to about 6.7% -- have had little effect on many U.S. homeowners. Yet their British counterparts carry mortgages that have to be renewed every two to five years. They've struggled with rapidly ris-

ing mortgage rates as the Bank of England has lifted borrowing costs to combat inflation. Catherine Mann, a member of the Bank of England's interest-rate setting committee, said Thursday that the U.K. economy's slowdown should be temporary. There are already signs in business surveys that the economy is picking back up, she added. "The data we have today is rear-view mirror," she said

on the sidelines of an economic conference in Washington. Forward-looking reports "are all looking good." Like the Fed, the Bank of England is considering reducing its benchmark rate once it is confident inflation is under control.

Another benefit for the United States is that it experienced a surge in immigration in recent years, which has made it easier for businesses to fill jobs, potentially expand their operations, and has led to more people earning wages -- and then spending those earnings. Japan, by contrast, is rapidly aging and has seen its population shrink for years, as it is less open to foreign labor. A declining population can act as a powerful drag on economic growth. In Europe, consumer sentiment is weak among consumers who are still feeling the effects of higher energy prices caused by the war in Ukraine. Even China, whose economy is growing faster than the United States', is under heavy pressure. Its stock markets have been among the world's worst recently due to worries about a sluggish economic recovery and troubles in the property sector. □



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, left, and Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama hold a press conference in Tirana, Albania, Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024.

**Associated Press**

## U.S. secretary of state assures Western Balkans of support for path toward European Union integration

By **LLAZAR SEMINI**  
**Associated Press**

**TIRANA, Albania (AP)** — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Albania on Thursday to reaffirm relations with a key partner in the region and assure Western Balkan countries of Washington's support for their integration into the European Union.

Blinken met with top officials and focused on the

future of the Western Balkans as Albania and several neighbors seek to join the European Union, according to top U.S. officials. Washington has strongly supported Albania's integration into the EU.

"We can't have a repeat of what we saw and what too many people experienced in the 1990s, which is why we're committed to supporting all of the efforts

to advance the integration of countries in the Western Balkans with each other and with Europe," Blinken said at a news conference with Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama.

The U.S. has praised Albania's leadership in the former war-torn region and its recent role on the United Nations Security Council as a non-permanent member. □



# Prison deaths report finds widespread missteps, failures in latest sign of crisis in federal prisons

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The kind of systemic failures that enabled the high-profile prison deaths of notorious gangster Whitey Bulger and financier Jeffrey Epstein also contributed to the deaths of hundreds of other federal prisoners over the years, a watchdog report released Thursday found.

Mental health care, emergency responses and the detection of contraband drugs and weapons all are lacking, according to the latest scathing report to raise alarms about the chronically understaffed, crisis-plagued federal Bureau of Prisons.

The agency said it's already taken "substantial steps" toward reducing preventable deaths, though it acknowledged there's a need for improvements, including in mental health care assessments. The Justice Department watchdog report, triggered in part by those high-profile deaths, examined 344 deaths over the course of eight years.



The Federal Correctional Institution stands in Dublin, Calif., on Dec. 5, 2022.

Associated Press

Investigators found policy violations and operational failures in many of those cases.

Among the 187 suicide cases, they found inmates whose mental health assessments appeared wrong and others who were housed in a single cell, which increases the risk of suicide.

Staff also failed to do sufficient checks of prisoners

in one-third of the suicide cases, something investigators also found contributed to Epstein's 2019 suicide as he awaited trial on sex trafficking charges. In that case, authorities have said guards were sleeping and shopping online instead of checking on him every 30 minutes as required. The prison also failed to search his cell and never carried out a recommendation to

assign him a cellmate, factors that were also echoed in other cases.

The report examined deaths from 2014 through 2021 and found the numbers increasing in recent years even as the inmate population dropped. In many cases, prison officials could not produce documents required by their own policies, the report states. Investigators focused on

potentially preventable deaths, rather than people who died while receiving health care in prison.

The second-highest number of deaths documented in the report were homicides, including Bulger, who was beaten to death by fellow prisoners in 2018. Investigators found "significant shortcomings" in staffers' emergency responses in more than half of death cases, including a lack of urgency, a hesitancy to use the opioid-overdose drug naloxone and equipment problems. In one instance, a prisoner died after a health care staffer accidentally turned off a defibrillator instead of administering an electric charge. Contraband drugs and weapons also contributed to a third of deaths, including for 70 inmates who died of drug overdoses, said Michael Horowitz, the Justice Department's inspector general. In one case, a prisoner managed to amass more than 1,000 pills in a cell despite multiple searches, including the day before the death, the report found. □

# Russia has obtained a 'troubling' emerging anti-satellite weapon, the White House says

By AAMER MADHANI and ZEKE MILLER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House publicly confirmed on Thursday that Russia has obtained a "troubling" emerging anti-satellite weapon but said it cannot directly cause "physical destruction" on Earth.

White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said U.S. intelligence officials have information that Russia has obtained the capability but that such a weapon is not currently operational. U.S. officials are analyzing the information they have on the emerging technology and have consulted with allies and partners on the matter.

"First this is not an active capability that's been deployed and though Russia's pursuit of this particular capability is troubling, there is no immediate threat to

anyone's safety," Kirby said. "We're not talking about a weapon that can be used to attack human beings or cause physical destruction here

on Earth."

The White House confirmed its intelligence after a vague warning Wednesday from the Republican head of the House Intelligence Committee, Ohio Rep. Mike Turner, urged the Biden administration to declassify information about what he called a serious national security threat.

Kirby said that the process of reviewing and declassifying information about the Russian capability was underway when Turner "regrettably" released his statement.

"We have been very careful and deliberate about what we decide to declassify downgrade and share with the public," he added. Russia has downplayed the U.S. concern about the ca-

pability.

In Moscow, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov described the claims about a new Russian military capability as a ruse intended to make the U.S. Congress support aid for Ukraine.

"It's obvious that Washington is trying to force Congress to vote on the aid bill by hook or by crook," Peskov said in remarks carried by Russian news agencies. "Let's see what ruse the White House will use."

The capability is space based and would violate an international space treaty, to which more than 130 countries have signed onto, including Russia.

The White House said it would look to engage the Russians directly on the concerns. □



White House national security communications adviser John Kirby speaks at a press briefing at the White House in Washington, Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024.

Associated Press



## More people die after smoking drugs than injecting them, U.S. study finds

By **MIKE STOBBE**  
AP Medical Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Smoking has surpassed injecting as the most common way of taking drugs in U.S. overdose deaths, a new government study suggests.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called its study published Thursday the largest to look at how Americans took the drugs that killed them.

CDC officials decided to study the topic after seeing reports from California suggesting that smoking fentanyl was becoming more common than injecting it. Potent, illicit versions of the painkiller are involved in more U.S. overdose deaths than any other drug.

Some early research has suggested that smoking fentanyl is somewhat less deadly than injecting it, and any reduction in injection-related overdose deaths is a positive, said the study's lead author, Lauren Tanz.

But "both injection and smoking carry a substantial overdose risk," and it's not yet clear if a shift toward smoking fentanyl reduces U.S. overdose deaths, said Tanz, a CDC scientist who



A man prepares to smoke fentanyl on a park bench in downtown Portland, Ore., on Thursday, May 18, 2023.

studies overdoses.

Illicit fentanyl is an infamously powerful drug that, in powder form, increasingly has been cut into heroin or other drugs. In recent years, it's been a primary driver of the U.S. overdose epidemic. Drug overdose deaths in the U.S. went up slightly in 2022 after two big leaps during the pandemic, and provisional data for the first nine months of 2023 suggests it inched up last

year. For years, fentanyl has mainly been injected, but drug users have increasingly smoked it. People put the powder on tin foil or in a glass pipe, heated from below, and inhale the vapor, explained Alex Karl, a RTI International researcher who studies drug users in San Francisco.

Smoked fentanyl is not as concentrated as fentanyl in a syringe, but some drug-takers see upsides to

smoking, Kral said. Among them: People who inject often deal with pus-filled abscesses on their skin and risk infections with hepatitis and other diseases.

"One person showed me his arms and said, 'Hey, look at my arm! It looks beautiful! I can now wear T-shirts and I can get a job because I don't have these track marks,'" Kral said.

CDC investigators studied the trend by using a na-

tional database built from death certificates, toxicology reports and reports from coroners and medical examiners.

They were able to get suitable data from the District of Columbia and 27 states for the years 2020 to 2022. From those places, they got information on how drugs were taken in about 71,000 of the more than 311,000 total U.S. overdose deaths over those three years or about 23%.

The researchers found that between early 2020 and late 2022, the percentage of overdose deaths with evidence of smoking rose 74% while the percentage of deaths with evidence of injection fell 29%. The number and percentage of deaths with evidence of snorting also increased, though not as dramatically as smoking-related deaths, the study found. It's complicated to map out exact percentages of deaths that occurred after smoking, injecting, snorting or swallowing drugs, experts say. In some cases a person may have used multiple drugs, taken different ways. In other cases, no drug-taking method was identified. □

Associated Press

## Alaska woman gets 99 years for orchestrating catfished murder-for-hire plot in friend's death

**ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP)** — An Anchorage woman has been sentenced to 99 years in prison for orchestrating the death of a developmentally disabled woman in a murder-for-hire plot, hoping to cash in on a \$9 million offer from a Midwestern man purporting to be a millionaire.

Denali Dakota Skye Brehmer, 24, was sentenced by Anchorage Superior Court Judge Andrew Peterson earlier this week in the 2019 death of her friend Cynthia Hoffman, whose death was captured in photos and video near Thunderbird Falls, a popular trail area just north of Anchorage. Brehmer pleaded guilty to first-degree murder in Feb-

ruary 2023.

"She may not have pulled the trigger, but this never would have happened if it weren't for Denali

Brehmer," Anchorage assistant district attorney Patrick McKay said during sentencing.

Peterson said Hoffman's



Denali Brehmer stands at her arraignment in the Anchorage Correctional Center in Anchorage, Alaska, on June 9, 2019.

Associated Press

pre-mediated murder-for-hire was "tragic and senseless," and that Brehmer showed no remorse. He said he hoped her sentence would serve as a deterrent to others.

Defense attorneys sought an 80-year sentence with 20 of those years suspended. Alaska does not have the death penalty.

Darin Schillmiller of New Salisbury, Indiana, was also sentenced last month to 99 years in prison for his role in Hoffman's murder.

Authorities in 2019 said Schillmiller posed online as "Tyler," a millionaire from Kansas when starting an online relationship with Brehmer.

About three weeks be-

fore Hoffman was killed, Brehmer and Schillmiller discussed a plan to rape and murder someone in Alaska, according to court documents.

The millionaire's only demand for payment was either photos or video of the killing.

Brehmer agreed to the offer, and enlisted the help of four friends, Caleb Leyland and Kayden McIntosh, along with two unnamed juveniles.

Leyland will be sentenced in June. McIntosh, whom prosecutors have said was the gunman, will be tried as an adult in the case even though he was 16 when Hoffman was killed. His case is pending trial. □



## Putin says Russia prefers Biden to Trump, calling the US president more experienced and predictable

**MOSCOW (AP)** — President Vladimir Putin said that Russia would prefer to see U.S. President Joe Biden win a second term, describing him as more experienced and predictable than Donald Trump even though Moscow strongly disagrees with the current administration's policies.

Putin's comments during an interview with Russian state television Wednesday were his first about the upcoming U.S. presidential election, likely to pit Biden against Trump. They were rare praise for Biden, a fierce critic of the Russian leader who has frequently lauded Trump.

"Biden, he's more experienced, more predictable, he's a politician of the old formation," Putin said, when asked which candidate would be better for Russia. "But we will work with any U.S. leader whom the American people trust." Putin's motives for saying Biden is a better choice for Russia were unclear, but Trump immediately sought to turn it in his favor at a campaign rally Wednesday night, hailing the statement as a "great compliment."

Trump and Putin have fre-



Russian President Vladimir Putin gestures as he speaks to scientists on the sidelines of the Future Technologies Forum at the World Trade Centre in Moscow, Russia, Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2024.  
Associated Press

quently praised each other in the past, and U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that the Russian leader ordered a hidden campaign to influence the 2016 U.S. election in favor of Trump. Both leaders have dismissed that finding.

While apparently endorsing Biden, Putin also blasted the White House's policy toward Russia, describing it as "badly flawed and wrong."

The remarks come at time

of heightened tension between Russia and the West and deep disagreements in the U.S. about how best to counter Russia and help Ukraine, which is fighting Moscow's forces.

Putin has claimed that he sent troops into Ukraine to protect Russian speakers there and to prevent a threat to Russia's security posed by Ukraine's bid to join the NATO alliance. Ukraine and its Western al-

lies have denounced Moscow's action as an unprovoked act of aggression. Several NATO countries, chief among them the U.S. under Biden's leadership, have sent Kyiv weapons and other military aid to fend off Russian forces.

Trump, meanwhile, recently called into question U.S. funding for Ukraine and said he once warned he would allow Russia to do whatever it wants to NATO

member nations that are "delinquent" in investing in their own defense. Those comments sent shock waves through Europe, where some leaders are preparing for a time when the U.S. does not play the pivotal role in NATO that it does now.

Trump's statement sharply contrasted with Biden's pledge "to defend every inch of NATO territory." Biden accused Trump on Tuesday of having "bowed down to a Russian dictator."

In the interview, Putin noted that Trump's view of relations with NATO's allies is consistent with his approach during his presidency, even though the Europeans sharply disagree.

The Russian leader described NATO as a "U.S. foreign policy tool," adding that "if the U.S. thinks that it no longer needs this tool it's up to it to decide."

Asked about speculation on Biden's health issues, Putin responded that "I'm not a doctor and I don't consider it proper to comment on that." He added that Biden seemed in fine shape when the two leaders met in Switzerland in June 2021. □

## Israel complains after Vatican denounces 'carnage' and disproportionate response in Gaza

**ROME (AP)** — Israel has formally complained after a senior Vatican official spoke of "carnage" in

Gaza and what he termed a disproportionate Israeli military operation following the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks.

The Israeli Embassy to the Holy See called the comments by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, "regrettable." In a statement Wednesday, the embassy said Parolin hadn't considered what it called the relevant facts in judging the legitimacy of Israel's actions.

Speaking Tuesday at a reception, Parolin condemned the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks against Israel and all forms of antisemitism. But he questioned Israel's claim to be acting in self-defense by inflicting "carnage" on Gaza.

"Israel's right to self-defense has been invoked to justify that this operation is pro-

portional, but with 30,000 dead, it's not," he said.

Israel has objected previously to the Vatican position on the war, including when Pope Francis spoke about "terrorism" without referring to Hamas.

Francis, who speaks daily via videoconference to a Gaza parish housing Palestinian civilians, has since tried to be more balanced in his comments and recently wrote a letter to the Jewish people in which he reaffirmed the special relationship between Christians and Jews.

In its statement complaining about Parolin, the Israeli Embassy accused Hamas of turning the Gaza Strip

into "the biggest terrorist base ever seen." It said Israeli armed forces were acting according to international law and said the proportion of Palestinian civilians to "terrorists" killed was less than in other conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the Italian language statement originally emailed to Vatican journalists, the embassy used the term "deplorable" or deplorable to describe Parolin's comments. On Thursday, the embassy clarified that its original statement was written in English and had referred to Parolin's comments as "regrettable." □



Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, speaks during a plenary session at the COP28 U.N. Climate Summit, Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Associated Press



## Catholic bishops in Mexico say they negotiated for possible peace accord with drug cartel leaders

**MEXICO CITY (AP)** — Four Roman Catholic bishops met with Mexican drug cartel bosses in a bid to negotiate a possible peace accord, one of the bishops said, and President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Thursday he approves of such talks.

The revelation by Bishop of Chilpancingo-Chilapa, José de Jesús González Hernández, in remarks at a public appearance, illustrated the extent to which the government's policy of not confronting the cartels has left average citizens to work out their own separate peace with the gangs. López Obrador acknowledged it wasn't the first time church leaders had held such talks, and that they have done so before in the neighboring state of Michoacan and in other states.

"Priests and pastors and members of all the churches have participated, helped in pacifying the country. I think it is very good," López Obrador said the day after the existence of the negotiations was revealed.

He said such talks had been held in the neighboring



**State police maintain a security checkpoint at the entrance of Chilpancingo, Mexico, Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024.**

**Associated Press**

state of Michoacan and in other places in Mexico as well. "The church does it, I can vouch for this, in Michoacan, and they do it in other places."

López Obrador said that while he had no problem with the talks, he wouldn't approve of "any agreement that meant granting impunity, privileges, or licenses to steal."

Many average Mexicans

have quietly agreed to pay protection payments to drug cartels for fear of being attacked or having their homes or businesses burned. The church has also suffered priests have also been killed by the cartels but some gang leaders talk with church leaders.

The bishop said the talks failed because the cartels and drug gangs didn't want to stop fighting over

territory in the Pacific coast state of Guerrero. Those turf battles have shut down transportation and led to dozens of killings in recent months.

"They asked for a truce, but with conditions," González Hernández said of the talks, held a few weeks ago. "But these conditions were not agreeable to one of the participants."

Asked by local report-

ers what those conditions were, the bishop answered "territories."

Drug cartels and gangs in Mexico don't just sell or smuggle drugs; they extort money from nearly every line of business in territories they control.

Under López Obrador's "hugs, not bullets" policy, the government has avoided direct confrontation with the cartels, allowing them to essentially take control of a dozen or more mid-sized cities, where the prices of most products are higher because they include a 'tax' charged by the cartels.

Retired Bishop Salvador Rangel, who headed the same diocese until 2022, told The Associated Press that he had been informed of the talks by people who were there.

He did not identify which cartels that attended, but there are at least a dozen such gangs fighting for control of various regions in the Pacific coast state of Guerrero, home to the resort of Acapulco.

Rangel confirmed that the talks failed because the gangs "did not want to concede anything." □

## Venezuela orders U.N. office on human rights to close and its staff to leave in 3 days

**CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)** — Venezuela's government on Thursday ordered

the local U.N. office on human rights to suspend operations and gave its staff

72 hours to leave, accusing the office of promoting opposition to the South American country.

Foreign Affairs Minister Yván Gil announced the decision at a news conference in Caracas, the capital. Gil's announcement came on the heels of the detention of human rights attorney Rocio San Miguel, which set off a wave of criticism inside and outside the South American country.

Gil said the office, the local technical advisory office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, had been used by the international community "to maintain a discourse" against Venezuela.

It was not immediately

clear if the Venezuelan government had notified the United Nations directly of its order to close the office.

San Miguel was taken into custody Friday at the airport near Caracas while she and her daughter awaited a flight to Miami. Authorities did not acknowledge her detention until Sunday, and as of Wednesday, her attorney had not been allowed to meet with her. Attorney General Tarek William Saab earlier in the week said she is being held at the Helicoide prison, an infamous institution for political prisoners.

San Miguel's daughter, ex-husband, two brothers and former partner also were

detained following her arrest. Of them, only her former partner remains in custody.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, based in Geneva, Switzerland, on Tuesday had expressed "deep concern" over San Miguel's detention.

In a tweet, the office urged "her immediate release" and respect for her right to legal defense. About an hour before Gil's announcement, the U.N. agency called for the respect of "due process guarantees, including right to defense" in her case.

The U.N. office was established in Caracas in September 2019. □



**A U.N. and Venezuelan flag hang outside the building that houses the Technical Advisory Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in Caracas, Venezuela, Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024.**

**Associated Press**



## Unique fauna of Aruba



For a small island, Aruba sure has a lot of unique treasures. Among these, we have some subspecies of animals that are unique to our island. These have evolved to perfectly adapt to our desert climate and make Aruba their home. At the same time, they are part of what makes Aruba truly one of a kind.

### Cascabel (rattlesnake, *Crotalus durissus unicolor*)

According to the Arikok National Park, Aruba knows two kinds of snakes, the Santanero and the Cascabel. The cascabel belongs to the rattlesnake family. The cascabel is the only venomous snake from Aruba. It has a length of 65cm to 100cm, and is about 4 to 5cm wide. Its color varies from light brown to grey-brown, and its underbelly is white. On its back there are marks that are a little darker, in the shape of diamonds.

Its reproduction is oviparous, meaning the offspring can hatch from their eggs just before, during or immediately after laying.

The cascabel lives mainly in the Arikok National Park. It likes to live in dark places, and is thus found hidden among the limestone rocks and under stones. As a defense mechanism, the cascabel uses its rattle as a warning, and it is not an aggressive animal.

The cascabel feeds on lizards, small mammals such as rats and mice. It paralyzes or kills its prey with its venom, which is injected through a bite. The enemies of the cascabel are donkeys, goats, humans and cars. Humans are the biggest enemy of the cascabel, as they kill them and destroy their habitat for urbanization.



### Shoco (burrowing owl, *Athene cunicularia arubensis*)

The shoco is a small bird which is seldom seen. They are active during the day but are more active later in the day and at night for hunting. These owls have very good night vision and very good hearing. The shoco is the national symbol of Aruba.

The shoco has about 20cm of length, and the females are slightly heavier than the males. They are light brown in color, with many white spots. The belly of the Shoco is either white or light brown, and the shoco has striking yellow eyes. Its beak is yellow/green. Young owls do not have white spots and are lighter in color.

The nest of the shoco is a burrow in the ground. If the shoco cannot find a burrow, it will dig one in soft soil. The shoco lays one or two eggs every other day until all the eggs are laid a shoco can lay up to four eggs. The first owlets hatch after three to four weeks. The shoco owl takes care of the owlets for three months until they leave the nest. Only a few owlets survive.

The owls dig burrows in the ground with low grass vegetation. An owl can live up to nine years.

Its defense mechanism is simply to fly away or retreat to its burrows. They eat mostly insects, mice and lizards, and the main threats to their survival are boas – an invasive species introduced by humans as pets and humans through destruction of their habitat.

### Prikichi (parakeet, *Aratinga pertinax*)



The Prikichi is the national bird of Aruba. On Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, parakeets can be found, but each of the three islands has a different breed. The Yellow-shouldered Amazon parakeet that we have on Aruba is also found along the coast of Venezuela. Unfortunately, there is interbreeding between the breeds due to cage birds from, for example, Curaçao being released on Aruba. The parakeet population on Aruba is in danger due to

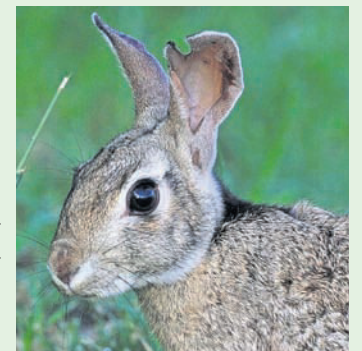
extensive deforestation occurring on the island because of the growing population.

The prikichi weighs between 90 to 100 grams. It has a greenish-brown head with some yellow around the eye. The back and wings of the parakeet are dark green, and the underside of the body is a lighter shade of green. There is also a bit of blue in the wings. The parakeet's beak is gray/black.

Parakeets often use termite nests as breeding sites. Parakeets are found in all natural environments (mondi) of the island. It defends itself by flying away and loud cries. Parakeets eat seeds from the pods of the Kwihi tree, Divi Divi, and columnar cactus. They also consume natural fruits. Its main predators are boa constrictors, humans.

### Conew (cottontail rabbit, *Sylvilagus floridanus nigronuchalis*)

The Eastern Cottontail rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) was probably brought over to the island by Indian settlers thousands of years ago as a source of food. This rabbit, locally known as Conew, has spread all over the island and has become part of our ecosystem. The very adaptable Conew can live in a wide variety of habitats, including Aruba's xeric scrublands, where it typically grazes on weeds and grasses.



The Aruban Conew has a brownish grey color and a distinctive white belly. This white fur extends to the bottom of the tail which becomes visible as the rabbit runs. These rabbits can grow up to approximately 40 centimeters in length over their short lifespan of 3 years. Cottontail rabbits reach reproductive maturity when they are just 2 to 3 months old. A female rabbit, called a doe, finds a suitable nest spot under a shrub or rocks and lines it with fur. She can have an average of 3 to 4 litters per year averaging 5 young each. The doe only visits her young once or twice a day to nurse her babies for a period of 2 to 3 weeks. The young reach independence at 4 to 5 weeks.

The Aruban Conew is an endangered species and protected by Aruban law. The Conew is thought to have drastically declined due to an increase in human activities, habitat fragmentation and predation by the invasive Boa constrictor as well as feral cats and dogs. However, recently there seem to be more rabbit sightings in rural and wilderness areas and also in the National Park. This could be linked to a recent decline of the invasive Boa population after the long period of drought. As the Conew can reproduce very quickly, a short break in predation pressure can lead to a fast increase of rabbits. Sadly, the Boas are back on the rise again with the truly wet rainy seasons we have recently experienced. This could cause a new decline in the Conew population that was just starting to recover.

These are but a few of Aruba's beautiful inhabitant, which we must all contribute to protect. For more information, visit <https://www.arubanationalpark.org/main/flora-fauna/>



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## Comedian Aruba Ray Ellin does his popular shows in Aruba for tourists, while helping the local kids



**Last year, comedian Ray Ellin—also known as Aruba Ray—saw a Facebook post from US social worker and frequent Aruba visitor Jennifer Koegel, asking for books to be donated to Aruban schools. He leaped into action, immediately purchasing over 100 books, mostly classic literature, and asking attendees of his very popular “Aruba Ray’s Comedy Club” to consider bringing books to the shows.**

The response was phenomenal, and Ellin delivered them himself to the principal and students at the C.G. Abraham De Veer School. His collection of books has continued.

Earlier this year, Ellin knocked on the door of the Imeldahof orphanage in Aruba, asking Director Mirta Leon, “Hi, I’d like to donate a library. Would you like it?” Hundreds of books have now gone to the orphanage, in addition to loads of school supplies he collected from generous schoolteachers in the States. He has also collected money from some very generous Americans who love Aruba, to contribute to building a new jungle gym at the orphanage.

Ellin recently celebrated his ten year anniversary of doing his comedy shows in Aruba. They are Tri-

pAdvisor’s Number One “Nightlife Activity” in Aruba, as well as the Number “One Show.” And twice Aruba Ray’s was named as USA Today’s “10 Best.” Ellin’s hilarious shows feature himself and two or three US comedians from America’s Got Talent, Netflix, HBO and Comedy Central.

He moved the comedy club last year to a new location in Eagle Beach, where the Eagle Casino used to be, inside the same building as Double Down restaurant. “I love this new location,” said Ellin.

“The Eagle Resort did a fantastic renovation, making the club as good as any in New York City.”

“I have known Ray for about 12 years now, and it still amazes me to see this caliber of entertainment in Aruba,” said Eagle Aruba Resort GM Richard Roy. “The shows are as good or better than any clubs I have seen in the United States from NY, Chicago, Atlanta, and LA.” It’s a must see show whenever you are in Aruba.”

Ellin’s love for Aruba runs deep, so much so that the front door of his home in NYC is painted with the Aruban flag.

And he said getting involved with the book project was an easy decision. “My oldest sister taught me how to read when I was three years old. In elementary school, my mother took my sisters and me to the library every week to pick out different books. My other sister ended up becoming a very successful writer. I loved getting lost in the different worlds created by Beverly Cleary and Robert Cormier and Judy Blume. I was lucky to have this in my life. Without question, reading is one of the most important and valuable things for kids to be doing. And when I heard that there were Aruban kids without access to these wonderful books, I immediately wanted to help.”

This book project was launched

in September 2021, when Miss Koegel started the initiative with Aruban resident Charlotte Wolff Croes, who was the owner of “The Homeschool@Paradera”. After Miss Croes passed away, taxi driver Robert Croes is helping Miss Koegel collect and distribute the books. The program expanded to other schools; to date, eight different MAVO schools have received close to 2,000 books.

It is an enormous undertaking for Miss Koegel to facilitate this program - she collects books from various sources in America, has to deliver them to people in America who are en route to Aruba, and then arrange for distribution to the Aruban schools. She does this for no pay, and spends her own money to do so—but she thinks it is well worth it.

“The overwhelming response to this project has exceeded my expectations. The respect for this project has been evidence that Aruba has the best travelers who are committed to helping the community. Through networking, I have made so many new friends and proven that small contributions can quickly make a significant impact.”

And while Ellin was moved by Koegel’s plea on social media, this wasn’t the first time he has come to aid causes in Aruba. Over the years he has donated his services as a host and comedian to raise money for the Animal Relief Foundation (ARF), the Aruban Special Olympics team, and during the pandemic, when zero income was coming in to the Aruban economy, Ellin produced online comedy shows from his home in New York City, donating all of the ticket sales, raising thousands of dollars to benefit The Happy To Give Back Foundation.

In June, Ellin will be hosting a comedy show in New York, to benefit the dog rescue One Love Foundation.

Ellin wants other visitors to Aruba to assist in this cause. “People who love Aruba can easily help. Just call Jennifer Koegel in the United States at 201-704-5415. Or come to a show and bring books!”

You can visit Aruba Ray’s Comedy on Facebook or Instagram, as well as [www.rayellin.com](http://www.rayellin.com) or [www.arubacomedy.com](http://www.arubacomedy.com) to learn more about Ellin, comedy, or books.





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## The Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins and its history

(Oranjestad)—The Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins is one of the most visited places by tourists on the island, as it lies along the northern coast line near the mini pool and on the way to the Natural Bridge. Despite its seemingly plain appearance, this ruin represents one of the most important histories of the island: The Aruban Gold Rush.

Built in 1872 by English company Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd, the gold mill at Bushiribana was constructed in the area where most gold was found by locals. The story of gold on Aruba actually dates back to 1725, when a first exploration for gold on the island was commissioned by the Dutch West

India Company. Under the leadership of Mr. Paulus Printz, a three-year search was conducted on Aruba, to no avail. Though they found some gold, it was enough to motivate a further search, and the assignment was discontinued by Printz himself.

It wasn't until 100 years later, in 1824, when a young boy found a lump of gold while out herding his father's sheep. His father took it to a local merchant who then sold the lump for \$70. Unbeknownst to the boy and his father, they quite literally struck gold, and as word got out, a gold fever spread among the locals who started searching for more gold. About 25 pounds worth was found.

At the same time, the Aruban government took immediate actions, and informed Curacao that gold was found. At first, everyone could look for gold, as long as they sold it to the government. However, after some time, the government decided to implement stricter rules and banned local search parties.

Over the years, concession-holding had seen different companies from around the world, all of which used primitive methods to dig and carve out gold from the rocks. Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd. was no different, but used a unique method that involved grinding the rocks



and letting the dust be blown away by the strong northeast wind, leaving clumps of gold behind. The next step was melting the gold and letting it attach to quicksilver in order to obtain pure gold. All these processes were done at the Bushiribana Gold Mill.

The gold mill itself had a short life-span: only 10 years in service, but its structure remained relatively solid till this day, and is now a historical remnant.

Sources: Etnia Nativa & [goldmineranch.com](http://goldmineranch.com).

## Aruba Tourism Authority honors loyal visitors at Costa Linda Beach Resort!

The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure of recognizing Goodwill Ambassadors of Aruba. These Ambassadors

were respectively honored with a certificate acknowledging their years of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.



The honor certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say "Masha Danki" to guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

**The three honoring levels are as follows:**

- Distinguished Visitor (10 years consecutively visiting Aruba)
- Goodwill Ambassador (20 years consecutively visiting Aruba)
- Emerald Ambassador (35+ years consecutively

visiting Aruba)

**The honorees were:**

Goodwill Ambassadors Edward & Adeline Davidson from Florida, United States.

Ms. Marouska Heyliger representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and staff members of the Costa Linda Beach Resort bestowed the certificate to the honorees, presented them with memorable gifts, and also thanked them for choosing Aruba as their best-loved vacation destination, as their home-away-from-home.

**Top reasons for returning to Aruba provided by the Davidsons were:**

- Aruba's hospitality
  - Aruba's great weather & culture
  - Aruba's awesome beaches
  - Aruba's wonderful locals
  - "Aruba's snorkeling experience is always the best"
- On behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the honorees for their continued visits to the "One Happy Island".



# Fruit Loose & Veggie Boost: Aruban fruits and vegetables

**Fresh fruits make a tropical holiday's picture complete. Whether you see the mangoes hanging in the trees or the fresh fruit cocktail on the side table of your pool bed, the link is there: you are in the tropics. Aruba grows her own fruits and veggies and there are some pretty out-of-space local species you may never had heard of, but really healthy and delicious.**

## Mispel

This is a fruit with a character (5-10 cm/2-4 inches). It does not ripe until it is picked or falls off the tree. Mispel is hard with a sandpaper like texture when immature, soft and juicy when ripe. It's technically a berry, but contains a skin similar to that of a kiwi. It's grainy and sweet, with a light, musky flavor. The sap or gum from the tree is also a source of 'chicle' the original ingredient used to make chewing gum. Rich in tannins, antioxidants shown to contain anti-inflammatory compounds, and vitamin C, essential for healthy immune function. Season: year-round.

## Kenepa

Ovoid green fruit that grows in bunches on trees up to 30m high. The fruit is related to the lychee and have tight, thin but rigid skins. Inside the skin is the tart, tangy, or sweet pulp of the fruit covering a large seed. The pulp is usually cream or orange colored. Kenepa strengthens the immune system, and prevents the reproduction of bacteria and viruses in the body. This fruit is highly recommended to treat lung infections and urinary tract infections. It also helps to cure insomnia and rejuvenates the nervous system. Season: the fruit typically ripen during the summer.

## Druf

There is no chance you did not bump into one of the sea grape trees while spending your vacation on Aruba. The sea grape plant is often used in ocean-side landscaping in sandy soil right on the beach and it produces clusters of fruit that resemble grapes. Are sea grapes edible? Yes, they are. Animals enjoy sea grapes and humans can eat them as well, and they are used to make jam. They contain very low calories and sugar, enabling good bacterium to digest food and excrete waste quickly which is effective in preventing constipation. Season: Sep-Oct.

## Shimarucu

Maybe Aruba's most popular wild fruit tree. You may have noticed cars at the side of the road and people picking those red berries. Well, that's Shimarucu. The local habit to stop for these delicious fruits goes from generation to generation. Its fruit's degree of sour depends on the amount of rain it gets. Red Shimarucus tend to taste better than orange. The fruit has super power: a true vitamin bomb. Adults only need to eat 3-4 of these berries to meet their daily recommended amount of Vitamin C. Season: Rainy months (Oct-Jan).

## Tamarind

A delicious, sweet fruit that has a wide variety of uses and applications, both for medicinal and culinary purposes. It is a medium-sized bushy tree with evergreen leaves and fruit that devel-

ops in pods characterized by long, brown shells. Inside is a sticky, fleshy, juicy pulp, which is the Tamarind fruit. Both sweet and sour in taste, the fruit contains a significant level of vitamin C, as well as vitamin E, B vitamins, calcium, iron, phosphorous, potassium, manganese, and dietary fiber. There are also a number of organic compounds that make tamarind a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent. Season: March.

When it comes to veggies the island certainly offers a home-grown selection. They taste delicious and have their specific talents to boost your immune system. Start the day with a 'batida' (smoothie) enriched with a local veggie touch or select your restaurant that offers local vegetable dishes to get the real pure taste of it. Comcomber chiquito

This is a sort of local squash, but looks like a cucumber with prickly skin. The taste however is bitterer than the cucumber and the vegetable is smaller in size but bigger in width. Inside is a soft, fleshy pulp and seeds, just like the cucumber. Comcomber chiquito is grown in the island and used in salads and 'stoba' (stew) or on its own in vinegar. The veggie contains multiple B vitamins, including vitamin B1, vitamin B5, and vitamin B7 (biotin). B vitamins are known to help ease feelings of anxiety and buffer some of the damaging effects of stress. Additionally this veggie is rich in two of the most basic elements needed for healthy digestion: water and fiber. Season: year-round.

## Yambo

Family of Okra, also known as 'lady's fingers': a green flowering plant. Okra belongs to the same plant family as hibiscus and cotton. A classic favorite dish in Aruba is Sopi di yambo. It has long been favored as a food for the health-conscious. It contains potassium, vitamin B, vitamin C, folic acid, and calcium. It's low in calories and has a high dietary fiber content. Recently, a new benefit of including okra in your diet is being considered. Okra has been suggested to help manage blood sugar in cases of type 1, type 2, and gestational diabetes. Season: year-round.

## Bonch'i Cunucu

A long, small bean, boiled for a side dish or snack. Long beans have a chewy, crunchy texture—more so than snap beans—and a flavor reminiscent of the dry navy bean or asparagus. Besides stir-fry, soups and salads, the long bean is a good choice for stewing, braising (to remain chewy and firm), sautéing, shallow frying, and deep frying. With cooking, the long bean's bean flavor intensifies. Long beans are low in calories, about 45 calories per cup, and rich in vitamin A and also contain vitamin C and potassium. Season: year-round.

## Pampuna

In the endless summer of Caribbean living we only have to concern ourselves with a wet season and a dry season. Still we do indulge heavily in the pleasures of pumpkin and enjoy Caribbean pumpkin recipes year round. A popular dish in Aruban restaurants is Sopa Di Pompuna, don't miss it. This dish is made of pumpkin soup,

and parsley. Pumpkins are rich in flavonoid polyphenolic antioxidants such as xanthin, lutein and carotenes and also contain vitamins. Pumpkin seeds are a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, minerals and proteins. Pumpkins are used to make desserts, breads and soups. □





# National Park Arikok: Aruba's biggest nature conservation

The National Park Arikok comprises almost 18 % of the island. Its rugged terrain, desert-like hills filled with tall cacti, breathtaking coastline and protected local flora and fauna welcome you to be explored. There are numerous animals to discover, for example the sea turtle who lays his eggs on the park's beaches.

The national park Arikok takes you on a memorable journey of the islands past offering unique geological, cultural and historical sites. These can all be enjoyed and explored either on your own or during guided tours. A wide variety of educational and informative programs and fun activities is available.

Did you know that four of the in total seven species of sea turtle lay their eggs on Aruba's beaches? In the national park, a Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*) keeps a strict eye on a very special event taking place below on the beach: a majestic Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) heads back to sea after laying her eggs, while another nest laid 2 months ago by the same female hatches a very rare occurrence of daytime nesting and hatching. Sea turtles prefer nesting in the cool and dark hours of the night. And hatchlings usually wait for the cue of cooling surface sand before emerging.

## Nature Conservation

The protected area of Na-



tional Park Arikok was officially established in 2000. Arikok National Park is a 34 square kilometers (7907 acres) of natural area, located at the north-eastern part of Aruba which contains examples of most of the island's flora and fauna against a backdrop of great geological complexity. We are proud to state that approximately 18% of the total land area of Aruba is assigned as a National Park, to protect and preserve the flora, fauna, geology and historical remains present within Arikok National Park.

## The Landscape

There is a great geological variety within the park. The main aspects are the rough hills of the volcanic Aruba lava formation, the mysteri-

ous rocks of the batholithic quartz-diorite/tonalite, and the limestone rocks from fossilized coral. The two tallest hills on the island are situated within the park. Jamanota hill 188 meters (617 ft) and Arikok hill 176 meters (577 ft), from which the name of the park is derived.

The line of the permanently wind-and-wave beaten North Coast is broken by several bays (boca's). Most of them are small yet impressive inlets at the mouth of dry riverbeds. Some of these bays (boca's) are spectacular sights, adorned with white, sandy beaches and sand dunes, as is the case at Boca Prins and Dos Playa.

Arikok is also home to Conchi, Aruba's most impor-

tant natural attraction; also known as The Natural Pool. The journey to the Pool is and adventure by itself and only possible by foot, horse, ATV or 4x4 vehicle.

## Cultural and Historical components

There are a number of sites within the park that attest to the history of Aruba. The Caquetío Indians left rock paintings in Cunucu Arikok and Fontein Cave. The bird drawing in the park logo is a copy of one of these historical artistic expressions.

Old plantation (Cunucus) sites tell the story of an active yet challenging agricultural past.

These Cunucus were also residential areas for the few families that worked the land. These families found ways to survive in the difficult conditions, and were able to erect their homes with materials found in the area. Two of these adobe houses have been restored. Park rangers are learning many of the old building techniques in order to preserve this unique Aruban mud-house. At Cunucu Arikok and near Plantation Prins you can find these adobe houses.



## Park Management

For the management of the park, a dedicated foundation "Fundacion Parke Nacional Arikok" (FPNA), known today as the Aruba National Park Foundation was established in July 2003. In February 2017, mangrove and wetland RAMSAR site #198 Spanish Lagoon was annexed to Arikok National Park due to its importance as a feeding and breeding area for water birds and as a nursery area for a variety of marine organisms. With this addition, the areas under FPNA management increased by 70 hectares while the amount of species of flora and fauna to be conserved to over 250. On December 21st, 2018 (AB 2018 no. 77) Parke Marino Aruba currently consisting of four marine protected areas (MPAs) was officially established and subsequently brought under management of FPNA. In 2019 management plans will be established for the new MPAs which include: coral reefs, sea grass beds, mangrove systems, a large diversity of breeding seabirds. Parke Marino Aruba also contains potential shark nursery areas, endangered sea turtle nesting beaches and marine mammal nursery areas.



**CROSSWORD**

By THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS** 39 Used up

1 Foolhardy 40 Sibilant

5 Spheres summons

9 Manner of 41 Calls on

speaking

11 Seasonal **DOWN**

songs 1 Gets up

13 Sudden 2 Prom

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14 Apartment ones,

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16 Unpopular choices

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18 Blocks 5 Available

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35 Vestige

36 Occupied

38 "— alive!"



Yesterday's answer

12 Sipping 27 "— Hear a  
aid Waltz?"

17 Groan 28 Moon  
inducer goddess

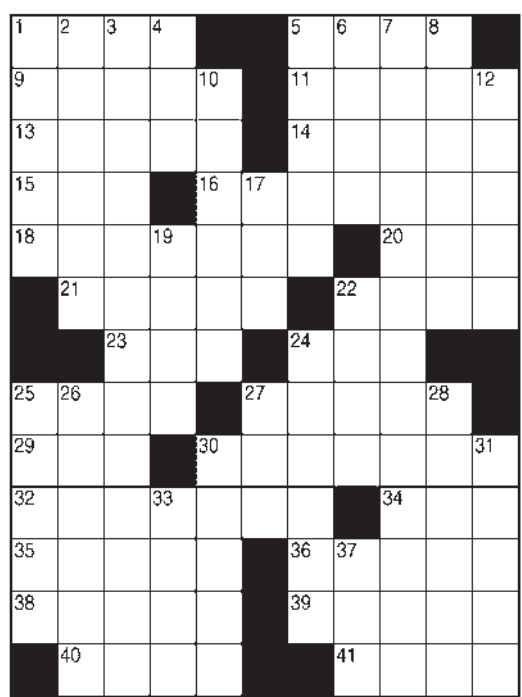
19 Stage 30 Family  
item symbol

22 Cutting 31 Diatribes

24 Main 33 Good  
impacts pair

25 Throws 37 Clerk  
on "The  
Simpsons"

26 Open, as a present



A XYDLBAAXR  
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-16

**CRYPTOQUOTE**

D P Z A , I R O T Y V O M R C A

L Z D D T C B V P Z J R J O A R J P Z C E

M R Q S P D S M J R C E F M T C B

DSMJM. — FRJFRJR FZAS

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: WINTER IS ON MY HEAD, BUT ETERNAL SPRING IS IN MY HEART. — VICTOR HUGO

# Are you in the wrong Medicare Advantage plan? What to review now



In this Nov. 8, 2018 file photo, the U.S. Medicare Handbook is photographed in Washington.

Associated Press

By KATE ASHFORD of Nerd-Wallet

Many people choose Medicare Advantage plans without exploring their options or noticing what changes their plan may have made, according to research from KFF, a health policy nonprofit. But now that a new year has started, you may realize the plan you picked during Medicare's fall open enrollment doesn't work for you. Or maybe you stuck with your old plan and it

changed this year. (That can happen, too.)

Medicare Advantage open enrollment, which runs from Jan. 1 to March 31, gives members the option to switch Medicare Advantage plans or move back to Original Medicare. "It's set up especially for people who begin the year enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan and allows them to make certain changes," says David Lipschutz, associate director of the Center for Medi-

care Advocacy. Here's where to start. **DOES YOUR CURRENT COVERAGE WORK FOR YOU?**

Even if you haven't had a chance to stress test your plan yet, do some research while you still have time to change your mind. Are there providers or specialists you want to see or hospitals you prefer? Make sure they're in your network. Check your medications, particularly if you're on a newer drug that may be covered differently by different plans. □

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# Dakota Johnson and S.J. Clarkson find the psychological thriller in 'Madame Web'

By **LESLIE AMBRIZ**  
Associated Press

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** — One of the first things that struck director S.J. Clarkson about "Madame Web" was that this was a superhero who did not have superhuman strength. And unlike Batman, she couldn't just buy herself some. No, Cassandra Webb has a different kind of power: Clairvoyance. This, the veteran television director found interesting.

"I saw the challenge of clairvoyance and the fact that it didn't necessarily scream action as its biggest virtue," Clarkson said in a recent interview with The Associated Press. "Because then we could explore the fact that you don't need superhuman strength to be a superhero."

How does one depict clairvoyance? Well, for that, she turned to the movies, re-watching Nicolas Roeg's "Don't Look Now," Christopher Nolan's "Memento" and "Inception" and the Wachowskis' "The Matrix." "I just sort of went across the board looking at movies that had done that, you



This image released by Sony Pictures shows Dakota Johnson in a scene from "Madame Web." Associated Press

know, and some horror. I was trying to find that sort of thrilling, scary space," she said.

"Madame Web" (currently in theaters) is the first of Sony's Spider-Man spinoffs (including "Venom" and "Morbius") that is centered on a woman. Clarkson had long admired Dakota Johnson as an actor and was

thrilled to get the chance to direct her.

"She has such depth and breadth as an actor. She grounds everything. She finds the nuance and pathos in everything. But she's also very funny," Clarkson said. "It was important to me that we didn't sort of, like, take ourselves too seriously. Yes, it's a psychologi-

cal thriller, but there needs to be moments of levity."

Johnson was excited about the prospect too, even if she never thought she would be in a comic book movie.

"I just loved that it was about a young woman whose power is her mind," Johnson said. "And I thought that that was really

important and inspiring." And, perhaps most importantly, Johnson felt safe under Clarkson's leadership.

"She just had everything under control," Johnson said. "I didn't worry for a second that it wasn't going to be great. Ultimately, like in the edit or even on set, it's just, she's so detail oriented and she operates on such a high level ... I just felt really held and I really, you know, trusted her."

In Johnson, Clarkson said she found an "incredible collaborator throughout," acknowledging the challenge of having to visually showcase the act of seeing into the future.

"Many of those scenes that she's in, nothing's happening. It's just her reacting and me saying, this is what's going to happen in the future when we film it, right? It really was a bit like clairvoyance for her in that she didn't actually get to see it," Clarkson said. "So to have that sort of partnership in that creative collaboration was imperative and invaluable, and we wouldn't have what we have without it." □

# Nonfiction book publishing is dominated by men. A new prize hopes to help change that

By **JILL LAWLESS**  
Associated Press

**LONDON (AP)** — Go into many bookstores, and the nonfiction shelves will be dominated by men.

The Women's Prize for Nonfiction hopes to change that.

"Nonfiction is still perceived to some extent as a man's game," said British historian Suzannah Lipscomb, who is chairing the judging panel for the inaugural edition of the U.K.-based prize. The judges announced a list of 16 contenders for the 30,000 pound (\$38,000) award on Thursday.

An offshoot of the 28-year-old Women's Prize for Fiction, whose past winners include Zadie Smith, Tayari Jones and Barbara King-

solver, the new prize is open to female English-language writers from any country in any nonfiction genre.

Lipscomb noted that in 2022, only 26.5% of nonfiction books reviewed in Britain's newspapers were

by women, and male writers dominated established nonfiction writing prizes.

"In all the ways that we recognize expertise and authority giving it exposure, giving it attention, sales, money earned by the authors women were not featuring as highly as their male counterparts," she said.

"So I think that we do still need to close what (journalist) Mary Ann Sieghart called the authority gap. And that's why this prize is needed."

The company Nielsen Book Research found in 2019 that women bought 59% of all the books sold in the U.K., but men accounted for just over half of adult nonfiction purchases.

Authors from the United States, Australia, Canada, India, Jamaica, the Philippines and the U.K. are on the prize longlist, chosen from 120 books submitted by publishers.

They include author-activist Naomi Klein's plunge into online misinformation, "Doppelganger," and journalist Patricia Evangelista's "Some People Need Killing," a searing investigation of the Philippines' drug war. There are works by leading academics and books on science and technology, including Cat Bohannon's "Eve: How the Female Body Drove 200 Million Years of Human Evolution" and Madhumita Murgia's "Code-Dependent: Living in the Shadow of AI." □



Naomi Klein arrives for a news conference at the Vatican on July 1, 2015.

Associated Press





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Passo Herencia

## All-Star weekend arrives in Indianapolis, a 1st-time event for some, a 21st-time event for LeBron

By **TIM REYNOLDS**  
AP Basketball Writer

**INDIANAPOLIS (AP)** — Welcome back, LeBron James. Welcome for the first time, Paolo Banchero, Scottie Barnes, Jalen Brunson and Tyrese Maxey.

All-Star weekend in Indianapolis is here, with some familiar names, some new faces, a nod to nostalgia and a bit of unwinding for everyone before the stretch run of the season. Most of the 54 players who will be part of the weekend's on-court festivities and quite a few more are coming as well began arriving on Thursday.

For James, it's his 21st All-Star weekend in his 21 NBA seasons. He didn't make the All-Star Game as a rookie; he made the weekend as part of the rookie game.

He's made every All-Star Game since, now the first player to be picked for the



**Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (23) celebrates during the second half of the team's NBA basketball game against the New Orleans Pelicans on Friday, Feb. 9, 2024, in Los Angeles.**  
Associated Press

showcase in 20 different seasons. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was a 19-time selection. "I'm humbled and very blessed, obviously,"

James said. "I don't take it for granted, being an All-Star. The fact that I still get to represent this franchise, one, my family which is

most important, my family name on the back of the jersey, that's very important to me when it comes to acknowledgement and

accolades and things of that nature and also the fans, who've been down with me for the last two decades-plus."

There is something for everyone.

There are all the traditional NBA on-court events the Rising Stars and celebrity games on Friday; the dunk contest, 3-point shootout and skills competition on Saturday; then the All-Star Game itself on Sunday. Added to the slate for Saturday: a 3-point contest between NBA shooting king Stephen Curry and WNBA 3-point contest record-holder Sabrina Ionescu.

There's a game between a pair of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, as the NBA continues to give HBCU institutions part of the All-Star spotlight. This year, the game is Virginia Union against Winston-Salem State on Saturday afternoon. □

## UConn, Iowa, Louisville and Tennessee to participate in Women's Champions Classic

By **DOUG FEINBERG**  
AP Basketball Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — UConn, Iowa, Louisville and Tennessee will take part in the inaugural Women's Champions Classic on Dec. 7.

The doubleheader will be played at Barclays Center and shown in primetime on Fox. The matchups haven't been set yet.

"The Women's Champions Classic is the next step in Fox Sports' longstanding commitment to elevating women's athletics, and we are eager to showcase these student-athletes at the highest level — in primetime on the Fox broadcast

network," said Executive Vice President of Fox Sports

Jordan Bazant, "Alongside our partners at HS&E, the



**Iowa's Caitlin Clark (22) talks with head coach Lisa Bluder, front right, during the second half of an NCAA college basketball game Sunday, Feb. 11, 2024, in Lincoln, Neb.**  
Associated Press

exceptional participating schools and their conferences, we could not be more excited to bring the Women's Champions Classic to college hoops fans around the nation."

The annual event will feature UConn and include a rotation of other top teams in the country.

"We're very excited to have the Women's Champions Classic on our schedule for the foreseeable future," UConn coach Geno Auriemma said. "There's never been a higher level of interest in women's basketball. The Champions Classic will give fans excit-

ing, marquee matchups early in the season."

There's been a men's version of the tournament since 2011 that tips off the season and features Duke, Michigan State, Kentucky and Kansas while rotating venues every year. It hasn't been decided where the event will take place after this year's inaugural one.

"Interest in women's sports continues to experience exponential growth and basketball is leading the way with viewership and attendance records continually being set," said Co-CEO of Horizon Sports and Experiences David Levy. □



# Hockey One. Hockey Two. Two outdoor NHL games at MetLife Stadium with playoff implications

By **TOM CANAVAN**  
**AP Sports Writer**  
**EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP)**

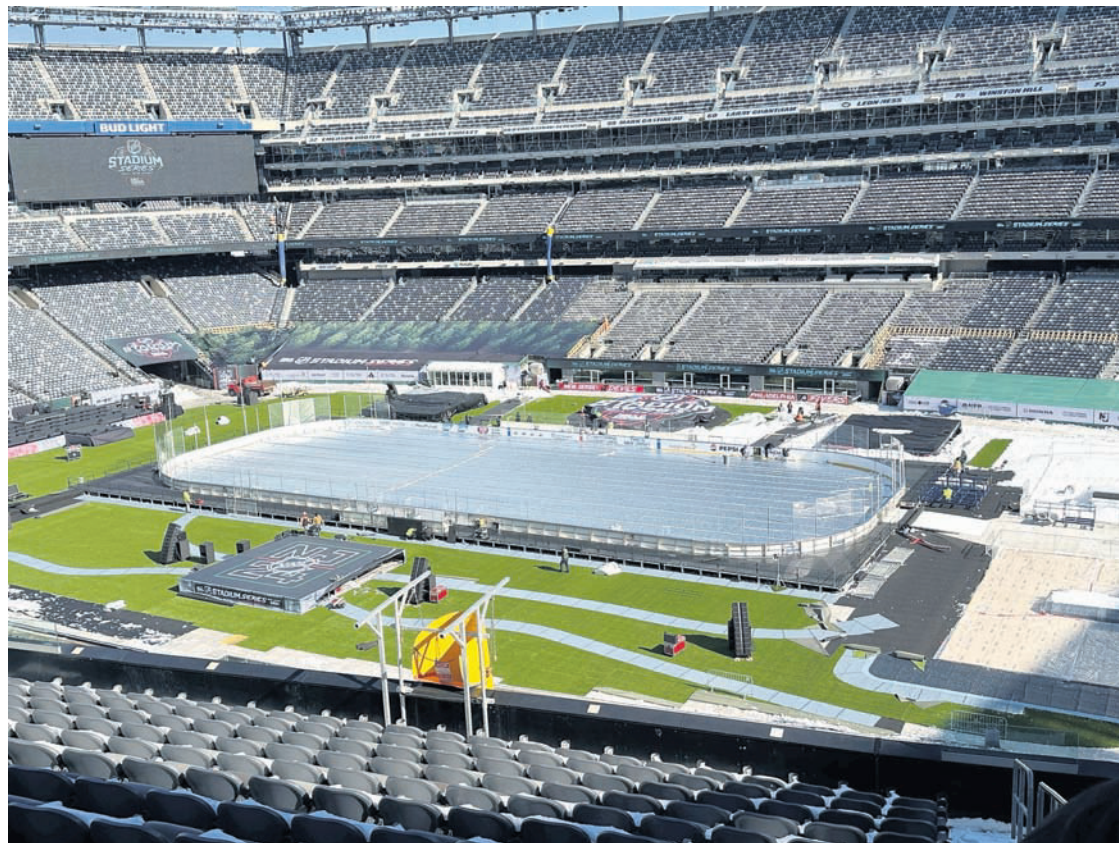
— Two games in two days. A concert. Four Metropolitan Division rivals separated by about a 100-mile corridor that runs from New York to Philadelphia. Roughly 140,000 fans sitting in bone-chilling temperatures waiting to shout for a goal or great save.

Hockey is coming back to the New Jersey Meadowlands in a big way this weekend with MetLife Stadium serving as the venue for the NHL's Stadium Series.

The New Jersey Devils are scheduled to play the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday night and the Rangers and Islanders will face off Sunday afternoon in an all-NYC contest.

While these so-called pond-hockey games has been on the league's program annually since 2008, this installment may be a little different. These games will influence the playoff hopes for all the teams with less than two months left in the regular season.

The Rangers have a little wiggle room at the top of the division but the Flyers, Devils and Islanders are in a tight fight for playoff spots



Workers build for the outdoor NHL Stadium Series hockey games at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024.

Associated Press

in the Eastern Conference. None can afford an off night, even in what might be a once-in-lifetime game for some players.

NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly wasn't sure if any of the 39 previous outdoor games had as much playoff implication.

"That always means a good game or good games, as

the case may be. I think that's fantastic," Daly said Wednesday as work crews were putting in the tempered glass around the recently installed rink that runs between the 17-yard lines. Hall of Famer goaltender Martin Brodeur is quite familiar with the Meadowlands. After the Rockies moved from Colorado to

New Jersey for the 1982-83 season, the sport complex served as the Devils' home for 25 years before leaving for Newark in 2007-08. Each of the team's three Stanley Cups (1995, 2000 and '03) were won in the former wetlands.

In a little more than two years, the Meadowlands will have another big

game, the World Cup Final. Brodeur, who started for the Devils in an outdoor game at Yankee Stadium against the Rangers in 2014, said the organization wants the players to embrace the game.

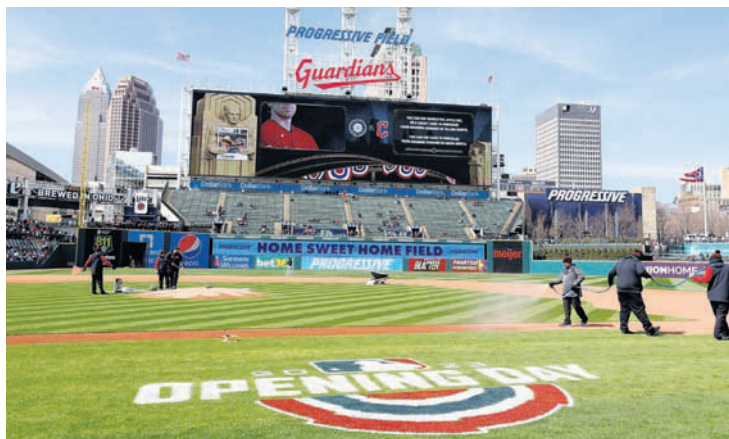
"It's no different in the Stanley Cup Finals," Brodeur said. "If they are able to adjust to this, when it's time for them to deal with the Stanley Cup Final they'll see that it's the same thing. It's a lot of distractions. You gotta block those noises."

It's the first time the league scheduled outdoor games on consecutive days with fans. The February 2021 in Lake Tahoe, Nevada, had no fans because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Yankee Stadium was the site for two games in 2014 but over three days.

"It's something that you circle on the calendar when you find out you're going to be involved in one and try your best to treat it like another game," Flyers forward Travis Konecny said.

For many, it's a way of bringing back warm feelings. It reminds them of either playing with family or friends, when sides were chosen by throwing sticks in the middle of the ice for selection. □

# Dark in the park: Cleveland Guardians to start April 8 home opener following total solar eclipse



The Cleveland Guardians grounds crew prepares the field for the home opener baseball game against the Seattle Mariners, Friday, April 7, 2023, in Cleveland.

Associated Press

By **TOM WITHERS**  
**AP Sports Writer**  
**CLEVELAND (AP)**

— The Guardians will throw the first pitch at their 2024 home opener after the earth, moon and sun align.

Cleveland's first game at Progressive Field against the Chicago White Sox will begin on April 8 at 5:10 p.m. two hours following a total solar eclipse, an event that hasn't happened in Northeast Ohio since 1806 and won't again until 2444. The team said Thursday that the ballpark's gates

will open at 2 p.m., giving fans a chance to observe the eclipse, which will begin at 1:59 p.m. and go for several hours with the peak coming at 3:13 p.m. and lasting four minutes.

The Guardians have typically played their opener at 4:10 p.m. but adjusted the start time after consulting with city officials who are expecting Cleveland's downtown to be crowded with visitors for the rare eclipse.

The team is urging fans to plan accordingly and use

public transit if possible. Cleveland is one of few major cities in North America in the path of totality, a 100-mile track of the moon's shadow.

Officials have estimated over 200,000 visitors will be coming to the area to witness the unique celestial show.

Most schools will be closed for the day, and some residents in the city's western suburbs are renting their homes to eclipse devotees from around the world. □